Pathologists’ Assistants and Their Role in the Practice of Pathology
Panel Members

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Program

10:00-10:30 AM  History of the Pathologists’ Assistant Profession and The Role of the Pathologists’ Assistant in Different Practice Settings
Speaker: Anne Walsh-Feeks, MS, PA (ASCP)

10:30-11:00 AM  The Relationship between Pathologists and Pathologists’ Assistants
Speaker: Mamoun Younes, MD

11:00-11:30 AM  The Training of Pathologists’ Assistants
Speaker: Pamela Younes, MHS, PA (ASCP)

11:30-11:50 AM  Questions & Answers
Program: Part 1

- History of the Pathologists’ Assistant Profession
  - The Birth of the Profession
  - Training Programs
  - The American Association of Pathologists’ Assistants (AAPA)
  - CLIA ‘88
  - ASCP Certification
What is a Pathologists’ Assistant?

“A pathologists' assistant is an intensively trained allied health professional who provides anatomic pathology services under the direction and supervision of a pathologist.”

Source: AAPA Scope of Practice
The Role of the Pathologists’ Assistant

Under the direction of a pathologist:

- Grossing of all specimen types
- Autopsies
- Training of peers & pathology residents
- Frozen section preparation
- QI/ QC/QA
- Laboratory management
- Regulatory Requirements
- Tissue banking / research
The First Training Program

1969: The first training program was started at the Veterans Administration (VA) Medical Center in Durham, North Carolina in conjunction with Duke University
Others Followed....

- Additional training programs followed at:
  - The Veteran’s Administration Hospital of the University of Alabama
  - Quinnipiac College, an affiliate of Yale University, in Hamden, Connecticut
Current Training Programs

Drexel University  
Philadelphia, PA

Duke University  
Durham, NC

Indiana University  
Indianapolis, IN

Quinnipiac University  
Hamden, CT

Rosalind Franklin  
Chicago, IL

University of Maryland  
Baltimore, MD

Wayne State University  
Detroit, MI

University of Western Ontario  
London ON Canada

West Virginia University School of Medicine  
Morgantown, WV
Training Programs

- Accredited by NAACLS (National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Science) since 1993.

- All are two year MS/MHS degree programs except Wayne State which is currently a two year BS degree program.
The American Association of Pathologists’ Assistants (AAPA)

- Founded in 1972, not-for-profit
- Premiere professional organization for pathologists’ assistants
- Provides education and advocacy
- Current membership 1,484
AAPA History

- 1969: First training program began
- 1972: AAPA founded
- 1975: First Annual AAPA Convention Atlanta, GA
- 1993: AAPA established an affiliation with the National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Science (NAACLS) to accredits PA training programs
- 2004: ASCP (BOR) – National certification for pathologists’ assistants through the ASCP
The AAPA, as an independent, not-for-profit volunteer organization of allied health practitioners, is dedicated to the advancement of the pathologists’ assistant profession and of individual pathologists’ assistants through advocating, promoting and sustaining the highest educational and professional standards for the profession, for its professional credentialing partner, for all associated educational training programs and for individual pathologists’ assistants; providing all AAPA members with high quality, targeted continuing education (CE) opportunities as well as professional development and leadership activities, including networking and support. The AAPA strives to promote and support high quality standards within the scope of practice for pathologists’ assistants in anatomic pathology, thereby ensuring the provision of high quality patient care.
AAPA Member Benefits

- The premier source of continuing education for pathologists’ assistants.
- The AAPA is an approved provider of continuing education programs in the clinical laboratory sciences through the ASCLS PACE program
- Job Listing and Hotline
- Group malpractice insurance
- Career and professional networking
AAPA Member Benefits

- Annual educational conference offering CME
- Workshops including:
  - Pediatric Pathology
  - Off-site gross lung pathology
  - Teaching residents and medical students surgical & autopsy prosection
- Upcoming meetings
  - 2012 Miami, Florida
  - 2013 Portland, OR
  - 2014 New York City, NY
AAPA Member Benefits

Quarterly journal

“The Cutting Edge”
American Association of Pathologists’ Assistants
1711 W. County Road B
Roseville, MN 55113
1-800-532-AAPA or 651-697-9264

http://www.pathasst.org
Clinical Laboratories Improvement Amendments of 1988 (CLIA 88)

- CLIA sets standards designed to improve quality in all laboratory testing and including:
  - Specifications for quality control
  - Specifications for quality assurance
  - Patient test management
  - Personnel and proficiency testing
Clinical Laboratories Improvement Amendments of 1988 (CLIA 88)

- Personnel and proficiency testing
  - PAs: Must meet educational requirements for high-complexity testing
  - Associate degree minimum
American Society of Clinical Pathology (ASCP)

- Celebrating 83th anniversary (1928-2011)
- Over 130,000 laboratory members in the following fields:
  - Technician Certification
    - AT, DPT, HT, MLT, PBT
  - Technologist Certification
    - BB, C, CT, H, HTL, MT, M, MP
  - Specialist Certification
    - SBB, SC, SCT, HP, SH, SLS, SM, PA
  - Diplomate Certification -DLM
  - International ASCP^i Certification
    - MT, MLT, MP, PBT
American Society of Clinical Pathology (ASCP)

- Fall, 2004: Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) formed between the ASCP Board of Certification (BOC) and the AAPA
- Only professional certification for pathologists' assistants: PA(ASCP)
- To date >95% of AAPA members are ASCP certified
- Contact information:

  www.ascp.org
What is certification?

- ASCP recognizes an individual as having the necessary competence and having met predetermined qualifications to perform the medical laboratory roles they seek.
- Pathologists’ Assistant (PA) certification requires:
  - Successful completion of NAACLS accredited PA program.
PAs must participate in the BOC CMP to renew certification

Certification is time-restricted to 3 years

Requires 45 points of continuing education over three year period:

- 1 point in safety
- 20 points in anatomic pathology
- 24 points in the areas of anatomic pathology, management, education, or other clinical specialties
State Licensure & Regulatory Issues

- The AAPA’s Legislative Committee monitors legislative & regulatory issues of interest to PAs.
- The AAPA is working with the American Society of Clinical Laboratory Science (ASCLS) to draft language specific to Pathologists’ Assistants for inclusion in their “Licensure Guide Bill”, a template bill used by individual state ASCLS chapters to create state licensure for clinical laboratory professionals.
Part 2: The Role of the Pathologists’ Assistant in Different Practice Settings

- Role of the Pathologists’ Assistant
- Scope of Practice
- Practice Settings
  - University Medical Centers
  - Community Hospitals
  - Commercial Laboratories
  - Medical Examiner/ Forensic Facilities
- Statistics
Role of the Pathologists’ Assistant

Under the direction of a pathologist:

- Grossing of all specimen types
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- Laboratory management
- Regulatory Requirements
- Tissue banking / research
Scope of Practice

Section A. Definition

A pathologists assistant is qualified by academic and practical training to provide, under the direction and supervision of a licensed, Board certified, or Board eligible pathologist, the following services:
Scope of Practice: Surgical Pathology

Preparation, gross description and dissection of human tissue surgical specimens including:

a) Assuring appropriate specimen accessioning.
b) Obtaining pertinent clinical information and history, including scans, x-rays, laboratory data etc.
Scope of Practice: Surgical Pathology

c. Grossing

- Describing gross anatomic features of surgical specimens
- Preparing tissues for histological processing
c. Grossing

- Obtaining biological samples such as blood, tissue and toxicological material for studies such as flow cytometry, image analysis, immunohistochemistry, etc.

- Performing special procedures including faxitron imaging and tumor triage
Scope of Practice: Surgical Pathology

d) Preparing and submitting appropriate tissue sections for:
- light microscopy (routine processing)
- frozen section
- electron microscopy
- immunoflorescence microscopy
Scope of Practice: Surgical Pathology

e) Photographing all appropriate gross specimens and microscopic slides.
f. Performing duties relating to the administrative maintenance of surgical pathology protocols, reports and data:

- filing of reports, protocols, photographic data or slide, microscopic slides
- assisting in the completion of specimen coding and billing
g. Assuring proper maintenance of equipment, provision of adequate supplies and cleanliness of the surgical pathology suite.
h. Assisting in the organization and coordination of anatomic pathology conferences.
Scope of Practice: Autopsy Pathology
Scope of Practice: Autopsy Pathology

Preparation of human postmortem examination, including:

a. Ascertaining proper legal authorization for autopsy.
Scope of Practice: Autopsy Pathology

b. Obtaining patients medical record/chart and other pertinent data for review with the attending pathologist.
c. Conferring with the attending pathologist(s) to identify any special techniques and procedures to be utilized in the completion of examination (e.g. cultures smears; histochemical, immunofluorescence, toxicological, viral or electron microscopic studies, etc.), and notifying all personnel directly involved.
Scope of Practice: Autopsy Pathology

d. Notifying the physician in charge, the funeral home, and all other appropriate authorities prior to the beginning of the autopsy; and coordinating any requests for special specimen sampling (e.g. organ transplantation, research, etc.).
Scope of Practice: Autopsy Pathology

e. Performing postmortem examinations which may include: external examination; in situ organ inspection; evisceration; dissection and dictation or recording of data such as organ weights, presence of body fluids, gross anatomic findings, etc.
Scope of Practice: Autopsy Pathology

f. Selecting, preparing and submitting appropriate gross tissue sections for frozen section analysis as well as electron microscopy and immunofluorescence.
g. Obtaining biological specimens such as blood, tissue and toxicological material for studies including flow cytometry, image analysis, immunohistochemistry, etc.; and performing special procedures such as coronary artery perfusion, central nervous system perfusion, enucleation, inner ear bone dissection, spinal cord removal, etc.
h. Photographing the body, organs, microscopic slides and other pertinent materials.
Scope of Practice: Autopsy Pathology

i. Gathering and organizing clinical information and data pertinent to the preparation of the preliminary summarization of the clinical history.
j. Preparing the body for release, (including indicating the presence of biohazards such as contagious diseases, radiation implants, etc.) and releasing the body to the appropriate mortuary or funeral home representative.
k. Performing duties related to administrative maintenance of anatomic pathology protocols; photographic and microscopic slides; and assuring the completion of coding.
Scope of Practice: Autopsy Pathology

1. Assisting in the organization and coordination of anatomic pathology conference.
Scope of Practice: Autopsy Pathology

m. Assuring the proper maintenance of equipment, the provision of adequate supplies.
The Role of the Pathologists’ Assistant in Different Practice Settings
The Role of the Pathologists’ Assistant in Different Practice Settings

- PA Practice Settings
  - University Medical Centers
  - Community Hospitals
  - Commercial Laboratories
  - Medical Examiner/ Forensic Facilities
Pathologists’ Assistant Practice Settings

- University Medical Centers
  - Teaching of residents, PAs, medical student and others
  - Management responsibilities
    - Staffing
    - Scheduling
    - Budgets
    - Committee responsibilities
Pathologists’ Assistant Practice Settings

- Community Hospitals
  - Surgical & autopsy pathology responsibilities
  - May be involved in teaching
  - May cover multiple sites
Pathologists’ Assistant Practice Settings

- Commercial Laboratories
  - Often more than one PA in practice
  - May cover multiple sites
  - May work different shifts
  - Usually no autopsy responsibilities
Pathologists’ Assistant Practice Settings

- Medical Examiner/ Forensic Facilities
  - Less common practice site
  - Autopsy only
Pathologists’ Assistants in the United States
Current Statistics

- Current membership: 1,484
- # Respondents: 540 (36%)
- Respondent Membership Status:
  - Fellow 92%
  - Associate 2%
  - Student 6%
- ASCP Certified:
  - Yes 94%
  - No 6%

Source: 2010 AAPA Membership Survey
Practice Settings

- Community Hospital: 43%
- Academic/University Hospital: 25%
- Private Group: 26%
- HMO: 1%
- Other: 5%
Approximately how many surgical specimens are processed in your practice setting per year?

- 1-20,000: 37%
- 20,001-30,000: 23%
- 30,001-40,000: 13%
- 40,000+: 27%
What is the total number of surgical cases you gross per year?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-5,000</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,001-10,000</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,001-15,000</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15,001-20,000</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20,001-25,000</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25,001+</td>
<td>4%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
On the average day, how many hours per day do you spend grossing tissue?

- 0-2: 8%
- 2-4: 11%
- 4-6: 30%
- 6-8: 47%
- 8+: 4%
What percentage of your time is spent grossing tissue?

- 0-25%: 9%
- 26-50%: 9%
- 51-75%: 26%
- +76%: 56%
## What are your job responsibilities?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grossing</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross photography</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frozen Section</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosecting</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-resident teaching</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resident teaching</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration/management</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tissue banking</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What are your job responsibilities?

- Supply maintenance: 30%
- Preparing autopsy reports: 23%
- Conference preparation: 18%
- Research: 16%
- Photomicroscopy: 8%
What areas do you manage or supervise?

- Cytology: 7%
- Histology: 12%
- Gross Room: 77%
- Autopsy: 36%
- QA/QC: 19%
- Frozen section room: 39%
- Other PAs: 29%
- Other: 20%
Are you involved in a pathology residency program?

- Yes 30%
- No 70%
Are there other Pathologists' Assistants at your workplace?

- Yes  75%
- No   25%
Are you satisfied with your career as a pathologists' assistant?

- Yes  95%
- No    5%
What is your base salary in US dollars (EXCLUDING benefits, bonuses)?

- **Average Salary**: $85,000 – $90,000
- **Range**: $50,001 - $150,000
- **2011 starting salary for new graduates**: $85,000 (range: $70-90K)

Note: Factors that influence a PA’s salary include experience, workload, setting and regional cost of living.
Future Outlook for PA Profession

- Promising outlook
- Increasing number of available positions
- New training programs
Questions?

Contact Information:

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The relationship between pathologists and pathologists’ assistants

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PA in Anatomic Pathology

- FS
- Biopsies
- “Routine” surgical pathology
- Autopsy
- Teaching
- Quality assurance/management
- Billing, coding, compliance
- Administrative duties
In the Frozen Section Room
PA First thing a.m. ...

• Review OR schedule
• **Highlight** cases with potential FS
• Search computer database for relevant previous path
• Writes case # and DX on OR schedule next to pt. name
• Calls Histology lab: send slides and copy of path reports to FS room
Pathologist first thing ... 

• Copy of the OR schedule already has the previous path case numbers, dates and diagnoses written next to each patient name, and previous slides ready for review.

• on occasions, we have alerted the surgeon for potential mishaps
PA most helpful when ..

• 3 or more specimens come in together or within minutes of each other

• surgeon walks in, wanting his/her specimen to be done first
It is not practical or cost-effective to have several pathologists come help in FS room.

The PA appropriately grosses specimens, takes pictures, correctly identifies and labels margins, identifies potential lesions and submits appropriate sections for FS.
• Cut and stain frozen sections when the histotech is overwhelmed.

• After the frozen section is done, may gross large specimens in FS room
• specimen photography
• freezing tissue samples for tissue banking
The PA on Biopsy
• Train residents on grossing biopsies, how to submit larger polyps, skin ellipses, ..

• Some may have PAs do a lot of biopsies; in other practices only help if needed
“Routine” surgical pathology
• Initially the PAs train the residents and Fellows

• Later, they gross side by side, different specimens; PAs provide help when needed
• Search for additional lymph nodes

• re-examine the specimen and submit additional sections, as needed, if findings in sections submitted by resident do not match or correlate with gross or history
• Help draft grossing room and frozen section room procedures, help with grossing manuals, ..
Autopsy

• performing the prosection themselves

• teaching and assisting
In most instances, the pathologist goes to the autopsy suite after prosection is completed to examine the findings, review the organs, and do on site clinical pathological correlation.
Teaching

• Grossing, autopsy, photography, quality assurance, coding and compliance to all incoming residents and fellows.

• In some institutions, PAs are given Faculty positions, starting at the “Instructor” level.
Quality assurance (QA)

- Select cases for review: random selections and targeted selections
- Distributing cases for review by subspecialty
- Collect and report results and track performance.
• At end of review, results are given to pathologist in charge of QA for further action

• QA results are forwarded to our clients as aggregate statistics.
Billing, coding, and compliance

• review ALL path reports for billing errors and corrections before they go out to the billing company.

• Also check these reports for errors in diagnosis, typographical errors, omissions, inappropriate sampling, uncommon diagnosis rendered by a generalist without consulting a specialist, or diagnosis unexpected from history or contradict previous DX: cases picked up for QA review (targeted review)
Integrating PAs into pathology practice
Before a PA starts working for you

- make sure he/she received adequate training.
- Know their strengths and weaknesses
When they start working for you

• **Observe** them carefully when they start the job

• **Go over their gross** description thoroughly
Team work:

• be open minded to learning from their experience, but also tell them how you like them to do things according to the way you practice (if necessary).
• have them sit with you at the microscope if they express interest to correlate with the gross.

• If interested but have no time to sit at the microscope, give feedback
• the more you educate your PA, and the more he or she feels part of the team, the better job they will do for you and your patients.